

2012 Citizen of the Year: Acknowledgements, surprises and thoughts about the community

By LLOYD HALVERSON

Camas City Administrator
and 2012 Citizen
of the Year

Citizen of the Year is a very moving and appreciated honor. I deeply appreciate it; how special it is to be counted in the ranks for our community's first citizens.

I would like to comment in three parts: Acknowledgements; Surprises; and the Community.

Acknowledgements

I would like to gratefully acknowledge many: councils and mayors (Nan Henriksen, Dean Dossett, Paul Dennis, Sean Guard and Scott Higgins); Jerry Oldani and Cliff Tingley for recruiting me for this. To Nan for hiring me as Camas' first city administrator; to Dean, Paul and Mayor Scott for retaining me; to Mayor Sean for asking me to help out in Washougal.

Also to department heads and staff, committees and commissions, business and community leaders, citizens and friends for their abiding support and kind, encouraging words, gestures and actions.

Also I want to express appreciation to many other people we have collaborated with, neighbors, legislators, consultants, experts, staff of state and federal agencies, professional city management colleagues, sister city partners and many others as well.

Most of all, I want to acknowledge my wife, Ulrike, and our now grown children, Lisa, Elena, Kevin and Erik. They were patient and steady, understanding and accepting of the challenges of my chosen profession.

First citizenship is really not about "me"; it is much more about "we."

Surprises

Second, I would like to surprise you a little. It is remarkable that I am very predictable, so let's see if I can surprise you — and have some fun with it.

It seems that citizenship is a very current topic for public officials, so my first surprise is that I was not

born in the United States. This is a fact, since I was born to American parents, who were living at the time in Canada. Nan and her team, unaided by modern technology, "E-verify" and the like, let this questionable background slip through, and now it's too late to do much about this grievous flaw in the screening system.

This leads to a second greater surprise. Some have wondered about my great interest in sister cities — particularly Polish ones. This, combined with lapses into "other languages" should have made me suspect.

Well, I can now — as retirement nears — reveal that I have operated as a "clandestine mole" for what was in previous times, "the other side." My assignment, over the past 30 years of city management has been to discover the true secrets of American democratic local government.

Having been placed first in the strategically important site of Independence, Ore., for seven years, and now Camas for 23 years, I have a full report of the "secrets" of US local democracy. I am forbidden to share the full report, however here are just two of the hallmarks that make American local government so durable:

- Process and repro-cess — for long periods of time — and then start again. Local examples include: "Solve" the downtown parking problem; reduce reliance on property taxes; replace the community center; hire a hearings examiner; deal with speeding on straight wide downhill streets; and a favorite, as current as this morning's complaint: "get rid of stray cats or at least license them."

- Use "tools" to process: discuss, repeatedly, hold hearings, form committees, send it back to staff, get consultant advice, put it on the agenda for the annual planning conference, get more public input, "vet" and "what does our attorney think?" And, again, bring it back to workshop.

These and many more elements explain the secret hardness of US local government. And seriously, I have enormous respect for



Camas City Administrator Lloyd Halverson, joined by his wife Ulrike, accepted the Citizen of the Year award on June 5, during an event organized by the Camas-Washougal Chamber of Commerce.

the value and effectiveness of democratic local government.

And the last surprise for now is a bit of teasing about my future plans: People ask "What are you going to do next?" It is good to avoid tiring people with long detailed responses to this question. So, for a while I have been saying: "Well, I intend to lose 10 pounds and clean out the garage." But that seems rather flippant, and the goals have eluded me in prior efforts. So, now I'll reveal of a possibility I have been considering:

Since Pete Mayer has recently resigned as head of the Vancouver/Clark Parks Department, there is an opening. Parks, trails and open spaces are something of a specialty; and I have some experience with multi-jurisdictional collaboration and cutting budgets. Therefore, I intend to call County Administrator Bill Barron and Vancouver City Manager Eric Holmes to get a sense of how my application for the parks director position would be received.

So, let me end this round of nonsense by assuring you that I am a native-born American citizen, and I do not intend to apply for the County/Vancouver parks position.

Community

Since the focus is really on "we" not "me," let this conclude with a few thoughts about the community — and especially

Camas.

We have been guided in our work by a vision. The existing Camas base was a good foundation and the vision was and is to create a place which is prosperous, very livable and green, and a real community.

Achieving a vision takes a lot of work and follow-through. With the support of the elected leadership and the community, this becomes easier than one might imagine. A key reason lies in cryptic advice a wise city manager gave to a group of fellow professionals some time ago. He said: "Remember, it's easier to ride a horse where it wants to go." Now I better understand what he meant.

Camas has wanted to be a very livable and green city, and a place of opportunity. The horse wanted to ride in the direction of the vision. So, our staff work has been purposeful and often a joy.

This is a great community, a special place. In the past 2.5 decades, the team has followed the vision, and achieved exceptional results.

I borrow an expression from the first governor of the Massachusetts Colony, which he used to describe to the mission of the immigrants on that first small ship bound for America's shore in 1620: Gov. John Winthrop said they were about "building a shining city on a hill." He urged his followers to build an exemplary community, and to deport themselves in ways that would inspire further generations.

In our special place, we, too, have been "building the shining city on a hill." Our team has done well, and we have shown our good character. Therefore, I accept the award in behalf of all those who have taken part. I do this with great pride in the community, combined with deep professional and personal satisfaction.

Halverson accepted the Citizen of the Year award during a Camas-Washougal Chamber of Commerce banquet on Tuesday, June 5. He will retire from full-time work in September after 23 years as Camas city administrator.

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